

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 1, 2013 at 8:37am

Slovenian archbishops resign because of ties to financial collapse

by Carol Glatz by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — Two Slovenian archbishops, including the president of the Slovenian bishops' conference, resigned because of their connection to multimillion-dollar financial losses by the archdiocese of Maribor.

Pope Francis accepted the resignations of Archbishops Anton Stres, 70, of Ljubljana, who also resigned as president of the bishops' conference, and Marjan Turnsek, 58, of Maribor, under the terms of canon law that cover "ill health or some other grave cause."

Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, told journalists that their resignations Wednesday were in connection to a financial scandal.

The archdiocese of Maribor, together with two other dioceses, had been co-owners of a number of private holding companies that fell into financial ruin because of about 700 million euros in losses. The companies reportedly made high-risk investments and took out unsecure bank loans over the years.

The archdiocese had tried to prop up the companies' mounting debt by putting a number of its real estate assets up as collateral.

Media reports about the impending crisis surfaced in early 2011.

The archdiocese responded to the media criticism in January 2011 by distancing itself from the amount of control it exerted over the companies while admitting that trying to seek earnings the way it did was "unsuitable for a church institution."

By February 2011, Pope Benedict XVI accepted the resignation, "for grave cause," of Archbishop Franc Kramberger, who had led the archdiocese since 1980 and was blamed for being largely responsible for the economic catastrophe.

His coadjutor, Turnsek, who had also served as a priest of the archdiocese from 1981 to 2006, succeeded him.

Stres was implicated because he also served as Kramberger's auxiliary, 2000-2006, then coadjutor in 2009. Stres was made archbishop of Ljubljana and primate of Slovenia at the end of 2009 and was elected president of the bishops' conference in 2010 and 2012.

Speaking to the press after his resignation Wednesday, Stres said, "The financial collapse of the holding companies connected with the archdiocese of Maribor has been casting a shadow on the Catholic church in Slovenia for more than two years."

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He said he accepted partial blame for the disaster, but he said full responsibility should be on the holding companies that mismanaged the money, resulting in losses for the archdiocese.

The two sees now left vacant will be run by two different apostolic administrators: Bishop Andrej Glavan of Novo Mesto will temporarily head the archdiocese of Ljubljana, and Bishop Stanislav Lipovsek of Celje will temporarily lead the archdiocese of Maribor. The two bishops were also just elected president and vice president respectively of the Slovenian bishops' conference.

[Lucija Millonig in Washington contributed to this story.]

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